

# PHOTOGRAPHIC EVIDENCE OF PREDATORS/SCAVENGERS AT BIRD CARCASSES AND LIVE BIRDS

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Despite a variety of control methods, blackbirds continue to cause damage to sunflower (Linz et al. 1993). Research on the use of an avicide, DRC-1339 (3-chloro-4-methylbenzenamine HCL), shows potential for reducing blackbird populations and, hence, damage. Though secondary hazards of DRC-1339 are relatively low, there has been concern about its use in South Dakota, particularly with regard to raptors. Birds potentially susceptible to poisoning by DRC-1339 have been recorded in the diets of most raptors (Sherrod 1978). In addition, endangered or threatened species, such as the Bald Eagle and Peregrine Falcon, occur in South Dakota.

The objective of this study was to photographically document predator/scavenger activity at bird carcasses and live birds in order to assess potential risks of secondary poisoning from DRC-1339. Cameras connected to infrared monitoring systems were used to photograph predators/scavengers. Camera systems were placed in habitats likely to harbor predators/scavengers. Carcasses and live birds monitored included blackbirds, house sparrows, pheasants (carcasses only), pigeons, and starlings.

Striped skunks were the most commonly photographed predators/scavengers, followed by raccoons and dogs, respectively. In general, mammalian predators/scavengers were more common than avian predators/scavengers. Red-tailed hawks were the most abundant of the few avian predators/scavengers photographed. American crows, great horned owls, and northern harriers were also among the more commonly photographed avian predators/scavengers.

There is little evidence that DRC-1339 poses serious risk to predators/scavengers. Mammals and most raptors are tolerant of DRC-1339 (USDA 1994). Few raptors were photographed, thus reducing risk. In addition, DRC-1339 is rapidly metabolized and excreted in poisoned birds, further reducing hazards; however, a few species may be at risk (Cunningham et al. 1979). Cats, crows, and owls are all known or suspected to be sensitive to DRC-1339. These species were common at study sites; however, few were photographed. Sensitive species would have to eat 2-3 times their body weight in a single feeding to receive an acutely toxic dose (Cunningham et al. 1979).

In conclusion, the data suggests that overall risk of secondary poisoning following the use of DRC-1339 to reduce spring blackbird populations is low.

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#### Literature Cited

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